

ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE OFFICE OF THE VICTIM ADVOCATE

MINUTES FOR

**September 12, 2014, 3:00 p.m. Meeting
State Capitol, Room 410
Hartford, Connecticut**

Members present: Mike Lawlor, Chair; Len Suzio; Dina Berlyn; Gladys Rivera; Christy Scott; Dawn Luddy

Member absent: Emily Landers

Chairman Lawlor convened the meeting at 3:06 p.m.

Chairman Lawlor introduced the two new members: Gladys Rivera, who was appointed by Speaker Sharkey, and Dina Berlyn, who was appointed by Senator Looney following the resignation of Brenda Jones-Barnes. He also conveyed the regrets of Emily Landers who was unable to attend the meeting due to a family emergency.

Christy Scott moved that the draft minutes of the August 7, 2014 be approved. Len Suzio seconded the motion. Dawn Luddy indicated that the draft minutes were in error and that she had attended the August 7 meeting. Chairman Lawlor apologized for the mistake. There were no other additions or corrections. The motion to adopt the draft minutes with the one change was passed unanimously.

Chairman Lawlor indicated that he had obtained an answer to the question asked at the previous meeting regarding whether a person may serve as an Interim Victim Advocate upon appointment by the Governor but before confirmation by the General Assembly. A previous victim advocate had, in fact, been appointed and served as an interim victim advocate when there was a vacancy in office at the time of that appointment. Since there is currently a vacancy, any new appointment by the Governor would serve as Interim Victim Advocate pending confirmation.

Chairman Lawlor then introduced the staff of the Office of the Victim Advocate who were attending the meeting at the invitation of the Committee in order to discuss the operations of the office and to advise the Committee on the types of skills they think the Victim Advocate should possess.

Hakima Bey-Coon, Staff Attorney; Venessa DeLeone, Secretary; Laura Stefon, Education and Public Outreach Project Manager and Merit Lajoie, Complaint Officer, introduced themselves and briefly explained their duties. Merit Lajoie participated by speaker phone.

Chairman Lawlor asked the four staff what they would like to see the Committee look for in the interview and vetting process.

Hakima Bey-Coon said that the first priority should be to find a person who can work well with all of the staff in a collegial manner. The person should be able to lead and blend with the others and treat all in the office as equals. The person should have public speaking skills; be comfortable dealing with the press; have experience educating others [both professionals and regular citizens] about victim rights; be able to work under pressure and not make impulsive decisions; believe in continuous professional

development and training for all staff in the office.

Laura Stefon said the person should have the ability to be critical without being adversarial; be able to work well with all those whom the Office monitors, as was the case with Garvin Ambrose. The person should have a demonstrated ability to collaborate with both sides of the aisle at the legislature and be comfortable dealing with both legislators and the media.

Merit Lajoie said she echoed the suggestions of her two colleagues and said that the priority for the office is to be effective in its mission. The person should be able to think outside the box; be innovative, and be able to collaborate. She said that the last year and a half the office had accomplished more than it had during her entire time as a member of the Office.

Vanessa DeLeone said the person should have experience as a manager, including both staffing and budgeting experience; should be open to feedback from co-workers; be able to multi-task under pressure; be able to adhere to strict deadlines; should be a strong leader with high ethical standards; should encourage growth.

Len Suzio asked about the balance between administration and advocacy for the Victim Advocate. Merit Lajoie answered that the office staff have always tried to work collaboratively and share those responsibilities.

Chairman Lawlor asked whether the Office of Governmental Accountability staff handled administrative matters for the OVA. Vanessa DeLeon answered that OGA handles information technology, billing and payroll.

Len Suzio said that he has seen different management styles ranging from micro-managers to delegators and asked what the staff preferred. Vanessa DeLeone answered that a 50/50 blend is best, and said that Garvin Ambrose had an appropriate balance. Merit Lajoie said that it is unrealistic to micro-manage in the OVA.

Len Suzio asked whether the Victim Advocate should have domestic violence advocacy experience. Hakima Bey-Coon said that system-wide experience is preferable. Merit Lajoie said that any experience is helpful but the office represents all types of victims.

At that point, there were no further questions for the OVA staff.

Len Suzio asked what happens if there the Governor fails to nominate a person after having been presented with the list of recommended names by the Committee. Chairman Lawlor said he did not know.

Len Suzio said there is a tight timeline in order to meet the September 22, 2014 deadline for presenting the Governor with a list of recommended candidates and suggested that the Committee should request additional time. Chairman Lawlor said that he had explored that option with the Governor's office and that, if the Committee informed the Governor that they would like additional time and chose a new date, that the Governor would not object.

The Committee then discussed what timeframe it would prefer and formed a consensus that October 6, 2014 would allow for enough time. There being no dissent, Chairman Lawlor said that he would draft a letter to the Governor informing him that the Committee intended to send the list of recommended

names on or before October 6, 2014 and that he would share the letter with the Committee members before sending it.

Chairman Lawlor then said that the next agenda item involved discussion of a nomination and that, pursuant to CGS Sec. 46a-13b, the names would be confidential and not open to the public or subject to disclosure. Pursuant to CGS Sec 1-225(c) a motion to go into executive session was made by Len Suzio and seconded by Dawn Luddy. The vote in the affirmative was unanimous and the Committee went into executive session at 3:45 p.m.

At 4:33 p.m. the Committee reconvened in public session and announced that it had selected ten candidates to interview in person and that those interviews would take place on September 22 and 24, beginning at 3:00 p.m. on each day.

Chairman Lawlor said that he would forward the list of ten candidates to Joe Olender at OGA and that Mr. Olender would contact the candidates to schedule the interviews in 30 minute blocks. He said that Mr. Olender would also ask each of the candidates for 3 references and that Mr. Olender would be asked to contact those references in advance of the interviews, and that the questions to be asked of the references would focus on the suggestions made by the OVA staff as outline in the minutes.

There being no further business for the Committee, the Chairman Lawlor adjourned the meeting at 4:35 p.m.